

Martin criticized for comments on hearing impaired

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- Page: 1

The commissioner expressed concern about the cost of voice services for the hearing impaired and non-English speaking defendants in the courts. He suggested the state pass a law allowing tests to determine whether someone can hear.

By PETER HALL

STAFF WRITER

An animal rights activist seized on a remark about hearing impaired people by Bucks County Commissioner Chairman Charley Martin to continue his criticism of the Republican-controlled board.

Martin expressed incredulity Wednesday about the cost of interpretive services for non-English speaking and hearing impaired defendants in Bucks County Court.

During a discussion with Court Administrator Doug Praul, Martin asked whether the court tests the defendants' ability to comprehend English or hear.

"If they say they're deaf, we don't drop a book next to them and see if they jump?" Martin asked.

The remark drew gasps and laughter from the audience at Churchville Nature Center.

Martin then suggested that state Rep. Scott Petri introduce legislation allowing for such a test. A member of the Republican lawmaker's staff was in the audience Wednesday for a groundbreaking ceremony after the commissioners meeting.

Commissioner Diane Ellis Marseglia scolded Martin for his comment.

"You know that is a handicap," Marseglia said. "I may be mildly offended with the reference to people who speak other languages, but that is not an appropriate way to talk about people who don't have any hearing. It's not funny and I don't really see the humor in that."

Stuart Chaifetz, a member of Showing Animals Respect and Kindness, used the exchange to step up his steady criticism of the Republican commissioners that began after Martin and Commissioner Jim Cawley voted to hire an assistant solicitor who represents the president of a Bensalem gun club as a private client.

Doylestown attorney Sean Corr pleaded guilty in January to harassment for shoving Steve Hindi, also a member of SHARK, as Hindi videotaped a pigeon shoot at the gun club. Chaifetz has attended three meetings since the vote to hire Corr, calling for his resignation.

On Thursday, he issued a news release condemning Martin for his remarks Wednesday, calling for Martin to resign and condemning Cawley for not speaking out.

Chaifetz was joined by Hindi, of Elburn, Ill., who issued his own statement, asking for Cawley to retire from the race for lieutenant governor. Cawley is the Republican nominee for that office.

Martin and Cawley did not return calls for comment Thursday afternoon.

Marseglia said she has received support for her remarks, but said the call for Martin's resignation is extreme.

"It's unfortunate. He didn't seem to have malice in his heart, but we just have to be careful about the words we use sometimes," she said. "I think that an apology is appropriate. That would suffice."

Peter Hall can be reached at 215-345-3067 or phall@phillyBurbs.com.

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